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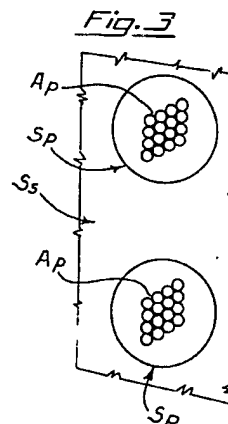
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54 Method for providing horizontal road marking strip material, equipment therefor, and horizontal road marking strip material thus obtained.

57 The invention regards a method for assuring high retro-reflecting capability and long service life for horizontally-installed roadway-marking strips. The same method also provides for making already installed marking strips visible in rainy weather. The invention also concerns appropriate equipment for applying the method.



Method for providing horizontal road marking strip material, equipment therefor, and horizontal road marking strip material thus obtained.

Over a period of several years, the Applicant for this patent has developed numerous inventions for improving the effectiveness of horizontally-installed roadway-marking strips, especially as regards the visibility of the strips under such adverse conditions as darkness and rainy weather.

Among these inventions, there is one covered by Italian Patent No. 811, 581 dated May 2, 1968, and US-granted Patent No. 3 587 415, plus many Italian patents, applications and several corresponding patents granted in the U.S. All these inventions brought about an improvement in the efficiency of optical elements incorporated in the marking strips. The retro-reflecting capability of the optical elements was improved so that a greater percentage of light emitted from the vehicle headlights was reflected back towards the driver, the optical service life was extended and, also, the marking strip acquired anti-skid properties. Italian Patent No. 24096 A/76, filed on June 9, 1976, concerned a further improvement: a retro-

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reflecting globule of special asymmetrical shape (also referred to hereafter as "asymmetrical pearl"). The special, asymmetrical shape of the pearl improved the optical characteristics, which were further enhanced by a layer of microspheres covering the underside of the globule. Patents corresponding to this Italian patent were also obtained in the US (Patent No. 4 072 403) and in several other countries including Great Britain, Sweden and Canada.

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More inventions followed, which concerned the method for depositing the optical elements and the relative equipment to do this, and ways of improving the optical efficiency of the elements as, for example, by making them have a double asymmetry.

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A special application method and relative applying device have also been developed, whereby the optical elements can be deposited onto the horizontal roadway-marking strip in a predetermined alignment pattern, thus obtaining maximum efficiency. These inventions are covered by US Patents No. 4 279 534, dated July 21, 1981, No. 4 322 177, dated March 30, 1982 and No. 4 369 001, dated January 18, 1983.

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A further step ahead was made by reducing the calendered ribbon of retro-reflecting elements to transverse strips, thus producing a product which is particularly suited for marking large surface areas. The transverse strips are primarily supported on rubber sheets, as shown in UK Patent No. 2 013 265, dated March 3, 1982.

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On the base of the forementioned previous improvements it should be noted that the present invention has regard to, and is applicable with, any and all kinds of retro-reflecting devices which can be made by agglomerating optical elements in ribbon form, as described below.

In essence, the present invention provides improved methods of manufacturing and depositing small plates of agglomerated retro-reflecting material which are capable of providing even economical types of roadway-marking strips with a long-lasting, retro-reflective capability. Various types of devices for depositing the retro-reflecting, pearl-agglomerate platelets onto the surface of the roadway also form part of this invention.

Various preferred embodiments will now be described with reference to the figures of the drawings whereby to better clarify the specific features of this invention; in the drawing,

Fig. 1' shows a narrow, perpendicular ribbon of asymmetric, retro-reflecting pearls, obtained from a manufactured item,

Fig. 1" shows a platelet consisting of an agglomerate of pearls and obtained from the aforementioned ribbon,

Fig. 2a shows, in a strongly enlarged scale, a pearl prior to being subjected to the impact of the traffic;

Fig. 2b shows a schematic representation of the wearing effect that passing road traffic has on the pearls.

Fig. 3 shows a section of horizontal roadway marking - which was applied to the roadway surface by means of spraying - upon which the retro-reflecting pearl-agglomerate platelets are being deposited

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Figs. 4 - 7 show, in schematic representation, various types of devices for depositing pearl-agglomerate platelets either on marking strips that are already installed or laid down or on strips that are in the process of being installed or laid down.

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As mentioned previously, optical efficiency can be improved by depositing the retro-reflecting pearls in rows.

15

In accordance with the present invention, it has been found that if the strips of pearls are obtained from narrow, perpendicular ribbons (shown generally at 1 in Fig. 1'), instead of from transverse sections, the resulting optical-component platelets thus obtained (shown generally at Ap in Fig. 1'') are very suitable and economical, their reduced required support area making them compatible with the asperity, i.e. unevenness or roughness of the roadway surfaces. Furthermore, their lower cost makes them suitable for substituting aligned single pearls.

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For the purposes of the present invention, the optical component platelets Ap may consist of elemental optical retro-reflecting pearls of a type known per se, as generally shown at 2 in Fig. 2a. Said elemental pearls may preferably comprise an asymmetric-shaped main globule 3, preferably covered at their flattened lower surface with minor or micro-globules or -spheres 4. The aggregate

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globule elements or pearls 2 provide a high degree of retro-reflectivity due to a mechanism of double-focussing.

Said double-focussing, retro-reflecting pearls 2, which are also called retro-reflecting globules, are preferably made of a plastic material. Such plastic globules do not become opaque under exposure to traffic wear as do glass globules. The traffic passing over them actually polishes the plastic globules; unfortunately, however, the plastic materials wears away to a substantial degree and thus their optical service life is rather short.

It has now been found that, if three or more rows (G_1, G_2, G_3, G_4) of pearl conglomerates are used, the optical service life is greatly extended. This is due to the fact that while the first row absorbs the full impact of the automobile tires and sustains the major part of the overall wear, the middle row, or rows, are only slightly worn on the top portion. The asymmetric wear on the first row also occurs on the last row, where the automobile tires leave the platelet. The attached drawings, especially Fig. 2b, show the typical wear pattern after a certain duration of exposure to surpassing traffic. In Fig. 2b, the globules are indicated by the reference letters G_1, G_2 and G_3 while the worn away portions are referred to with the corresponding reference letters U_1, U_2 and U_3 . The direction of traffic is indicated by the letter "V". The wear pattern is practically symmetrical about the platelet centerline with portion U_1 being most worn towards the side with which the tires first come in contact, and portion U_3 being most worn towards the side which last contacts the passing tire. Portion U_2 , as seen, is only

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worn at the top. These platelets can, therefore, be called "symmetrically wearing" platelets, with reference to their centerlines, and can also be used to take the place of rows of individual retro-reflecting elements.

5

Various techniques for applying or installing different types of roadway markings have been used for a long time and are well known, among which methods of application by the simple spraying or brushing on of paint, while
10 another very important method is the installation of thermoplastic markings, this latter type being of a permanent nature and measuring 3 mm in thickness. All of the various previous kinds of roadway markings, however, have one serious drawback: poor visibility of the mar-
15 kings at night or in rainy weather. The thermoplastic, or so-called "hot-plastic", roadway markings are used the world over but, in a stricter sense, they are not entirely effective in providing the required amount of safety. In the absence of anything available which would
20 be superior to the "hot-plastic" roadway marking, the use of this type of marking had been accepted and tolerated.

The markings being poorly visible at night, the "hot-plastic" type is often sprayed with a light-reflecting
25 paint; this, however, provides only for a temporary solution as it is effective for only a short period of time. Another more effective but much more expensive solution is the interspersing of light-reflecting buttons in the strip when installing it. Besides the serious
30 drawback of the high cost of this method, there is also the drawback of its losing 50 % optical efficiency after only one year of service, plus the fact that its in-

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stallation causes the road surface to deteriorate more rapidly.

The Applicant has contributed a noteworthy solution to
5 the problem of poor night and rainy weather visibility
by developing special prefabricated marking strips.
These special marking strips also incorporate, generally
but not necessarily, high-hardness crystal particles
which provide anti-skid properties for the strips. As
10 regards this aspect of the marking strip, reference is
made, for example, to US Patents No. 3 935 365 and
No. 4 020 211. Various systems and means have been de-
vised for assuring night time visibility of the prefabri-
cated marking strips when struck by such low-angle lighting
15 as produced by automotive headlights. In this regard reference is
made to US Patents No. 3 587 415 and No. 3 765 425,
French Patent No. 1 578 688 and British Patent No. 1 245 834.

The Applicant has developed a series of optical components
20 which provide considerable visibility for marking strips
at night and especially during rainy weather. In this
regard, reference is made to US Patents No. 4 072 403 and
No. 4 129 397. The inventor has thus developed various
types of composite, prefabricated strips for making and
25 installing roadway-marking strips which incorporate spe-
cial, sophisticated optical components that guarantee
a high degree of visibility and safety even under rainy
conditions.

30 These relatively expensive innovations, which considerably
improve night-driving safety, are only slowly being in-
troduced and adapted on the international market, as the

funds available to the road and highway maintenance departments are insufficient in most cases to permit more extensive use. Meanwhile, the public continues to run excessive risks when driving at night or in rainy weather.

5 It is a real problem, therefore, which can only increase rather than decrease unless positive steps are taken to provide the kind of roadway-marking strips which are optically efficient in any kind of light or weather and maintain this efficiency for years.

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When considering the ever-increasing amount of road traffic in the world, the magnitude of the problem and importance of coping with it satisfactorily becomes quite evident.

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One practical approach to solving this problem is the depositing of the above described agglomerate platelets in accordance with one major aspect of the present invention, onto marking strips which are in the process of
20 being installed or laid down on the roadway surface, such as the "hot-plastic" type of roadway marking. The additional cost involved would be modest and, as a rule, no additional adhesive material would be required to apply the platelets. The platelets, however, must be deposited
25 while the plastic material is in its fluid state.

Another practical approach is the depositing of the platelets on roadway markings already installed on the surface of the roadway. This approach involves the
30 application of an adhesive material either onto the roadway marking surface or on the underside of the platelets. Various types of suitable adhesives are found

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on the market which are compatible with the roadway marking itself and are resistant to hydrolysis. The platelets are then attached to the roadway marking and provide the desired visibility.

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According to this invention, the above-mentioned method has the following advantages:

- 10 1) The use of a high-quality, rapidly-setting adhesive, requiring little or no solvent, due to the small amount needed (considering that the overall use of sprayed road markings with optical components represents a very limited proportion of the marked area).
- 15 2) The use of smaller-sized, lower-cost platelets having a service life proportional to that of the roadway marking already in service. The smaller size does not involve any appreciable increase in thickness.
- 20 3) The marking strip already in service and modified in accordance with the present invention does not undergo any practical changes, thereby maintaining all of its original characteristics.

Fig. 3 at Ss shows a section of a sprayed-on, horizontal marking strip, applied with the use of well-known equipment. Spray layers Sp of adhesive, using little or no solvent, are applied to the marking strip Ss. This type of adhesive is well known to those skilled in this type of art. Since the agglomerate segments are usually made of methacrylic material, the epoxy adhesives offer the advantages of high mechanical properties and high compatibility with the marking strip.

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The Sp adhesive layers are applied the full length of the

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marking strip at intervals that are a multiple of the length of each individual spray layer. This multiple should be, preferably but not critically, four or more.

- 5 Using suitable mechanical means, the asymmetrical-pearl agglomerate platelets Ap are applied to the adhesive layers in a coherent fashion. The platelets Ap become attached to the Sp adhesive layers. The platelets Ap can, however, also be attached by means of a melting-type
10 adhesive applied to the underside of the platelets.

- The platelets to be used, both when applying them to marking strips already in service or to marking strips being installed together with the platelets, must be a
15 little narrower than the width of the marking strip, as a rule, and must extend or project above the strip surface a distance of at least one millimeter whereby to ascertain that they will extend or project above the film of water formed when it rains.

- 20 As mentioned, the present invention also provides for various types of equipment for rapidly depositing the platelets. The equipment of the present invention can be used both for depositing platelets, on roadway markings
25 already in service, and on roadway markings in the process of being installed or laid down. Such equipment in accordance with the invention is shown in Figs. 4 to 7. The relative descriptions follow:

- 30 More particularly Fig. 4 shows a device for depositing platelets at a high speed on roadway markings that are being installed. A ribbon 12 of pearl strips of the type shown in Fig. 1' is passed in contact with a perforated

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roller 10. A partial vacuum maintained inside the roller causes the ribbon 12 to adhere to the perforated surface of the roller 10. Rubber counter-rollers 14 assist in keeping the ribbon adhered to the roller 10. A cutting
5 roller 16 then cuts the ribbon 12 into the desired agglomerate units of the type as shown in Fig. 1". These units are deposited in position 18 by means of an air jet 20.

10 Various types of cutting rollers 16 can be used, according to the number of rows of pearls desired for each deposited agglomerate unit. The distance D between the agglomerate units is determined by the rotational speed of the perforated roller 10 and its advancement speed
15 along the roadway surface S.

Fig. 5 shows a device for depositing pearl agglomerates from a cartridge. This version is shown in connection and combination with a device for spraying an adhesive.
20 The device comprises a carriage 30 which is provided with means 20 for manual actuation:

On the carriage 30 are provided the following parts:

- 25 - An aerosol bottle 34 containing an adhesive
- a spray nozzle 36 fed with the adhesive from the bottle 34 through a hose 38 provided with a shut-off valve (not shown but described later)
- A battery of one or more containers 40 holding the
30 platelets to be deposited. If there are more than one such container, they are positioned transversally and can successively be moved into position for depo-

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siting platelets as the preceding containers become emptied.

At the depositing position there is an ejector device
5 42 which successively pushes out the lowermost platelet
at the bottom of the container and allows the next
above platelet to take its place. The process is then
repeated as many times as is required.

10 - A pressing weight 44, actuated by a cable 46, which
can be caused to fall down onto the platelet just de-
posited to make it firmly adhere to the adhesive-coated
surface.

15 - A set 48 of appropriately-phased cams 54, 58, 62, mounted
on a common axis and driven by a drive chain 50, or
other equivalent appropriate drive means, connected to
one of the wheels 52 of the carriage 30. The first
cam 54 of said cam set 48 provides for opening the
20 valve located in the hose 38 between the bottle 34
and the spray nozzle 36. The valve is closed again by
a spring 56.

The second cam 58 actuates the ejection device 42
25 effective to push out the platelet from a slot at the
bottom of the platelet container 40. The ejection de-
vice is returned to its unactivated or rest condition
by means of a spring 60.

30 The third cam 62 actuates the lowering of the pressing
weight 44. A spring 64 returns the weight 44 back to
its original position.

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It is obvious to those skilled in the art that by simply modifying the transmission ratio between the wheels 52 of the carriage 30 and the cam set 48 the distance between the platelets deposited on the marking strip Ss can be varied in any desired manner.

Fig. 6 represents a device for depositing platelets, contained in one or more containers, on roadway markings already in service, by means of a drum 70 similar to that illustrated in Fig. 4. The device is embodied in a carriage and for example is supposed to move in the direction shown by the arrow 65. The general structure of the device of Fig. 6 is analogous to the carriages illustrated previously.

A battery of cartridges 66 is provided for holding a supply of platelets. Cartridge 68 is in the working position, which corresponds to the position above drum 70. Drum 70 is provided along its surface with appropriate recesses 72 for receiving the platelets. A suction depression is maintained inside the drum so that as the platelets locate themselves in the recesses 72 they will be held in position.

As drum 70 brings a platelet into the right position, a jet of air ejected through an air pipe 74 blows out or ejects the platelet onto the roadway surface which, as in the previously-described cases, has been appropriately covered with a suitable adhesive. Drum 70 is connected by means of a chain to auxiliary devices. First of all there is a blower which provides both the partial vacuum inside drum 70 and the elevated ejection pressure inside

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- air pipe 74. By means of cams or some such other equivalent arrangement, drum 70 may also control the action of such automatic equipment as a pneumatic piston which, in conjunction with a counter, removes the empty cartridges and replaces them with full ones, or the release of a counter-weight or spring which effects the same operation. As an example of the automatic operations that can be incorporated there is shown at 76 a pneumatic piston effective to hold the cartridge in the working position. Of course, the equipment of the present invention does not necessarily have to have the automatic auxiliary devices just mentioned. The operator may just as well perform the described operations manually.
- Fig. 7 schematically represents another embodiment of equipment in accordance with the invention for depositing retro-reflecting pearl agglomerate platelets, with parts not really essential being omitted for the sake of clarity and simplicity. The equipment of Fig. 7 has a spindle 80 supported in a conventional manner on suitable spindle supports 82. The spindle is assumed to rotate in the direction shown by an arrow F and the marking-strip ribbon 84 unwinds from it. The position of the ribbon when the spindle is full is shown at 84, whereas 84' shows its position when the spindle is almost empty. The ribbon is guided in the right direction by an idler roller 86 onto a chute 88 from which the sequence of platelets P is successively allowed to fall onto the surface T.
- A piston 90 provides for a constant advancement at a fixed distance interval and has an idle return stroke. The required transmission means are well known and include a

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rubber-coated advancement roller 92 with side guides
and operating against a counter-roller 94.

5 Among its operational components the equipment further
includes an actuating piston 96 for actuating a bending-
shearing punch, the end of which is indicated at 98.

Claims:

1. A method for providing horizontal road marking strip material with a high degree of retro-reflecting capability utilizing optical elements of a generally globular shape projecting from the surface of the road marking strip material in its operative condition on the road surface, characterized by depositing onto known types of horizontal roadway-marking strips retro-reflecting pearl-agglomerate platelets (Ap) comprising at least two rows (G_1 , G_2 , G_3 , G_4).
2. A method in accordance with claim 1 for providing horizontal road marking strip material with a high degree of retro-reflecting capability and with long optical service life, characterized by depositing onto known types of horizontal roadway-marking strips retro-reflecting, pearl-agglomerate platelets (Ap) having at least three rows (G_1 , G_2 , G_3 , Fig. 2b), the first (G_1) and the last (G_3) of said rows wearing away in the same manner as does a single pearl, while the intermediate row or rows (G_2) are protected by said first (G_1) and the last (G_3) rows and thus wearing off much more slowly.
3. A method in accordance with claim 1 or claim 2, characterized in that said pearl-agglomerate platelets (Ap) are obtained by cutting from perpendicular ribbons (1) of calendered, retro-reflecting material.
4. A method in accordance with any of the preceding claims, characterized by utilizing agglomerate platelets (Ap)

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which are characteristically narrower than the width of the roadway-marking strip (Ss, Fig. 2a).

- 5 5. A method in accordance with any of the preceding claims, characterized by locally applying agglomerate platelets (Ap) comprising several rows (G_1 , G_2 , G_3 , G_4) onto a roadway-marking strip (Ss) during the installation of laying down of said strip onto the roadway.
10
6. A method in accordance with any of claims 1 through 4, for providing an already installed roadway-marking strip with visibility in rainy weather, characterized by locally spraying an adhesive in small areas (Sp, Fig. 2a) on the top surface of a roadway-marking strip (Ss) already in service, said adhesive being selected to be compatible with the roadway-marking strip, followed by depositing agglomerate platelets (Ap) designed to provide marking-strip visibility under rainy conditions, onto the adhesive-covered areas (Sp).
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7. A method in accordance with claim 6, characterized in that said adhesive spraying operations are effected sequentially with repetitious intervals with the separation between sprayed areas being at least four times the length of the sprayed area, measured essentially in the direction of the marking strip.
25
- 30 8. A method in accordance with any of claims 1 through 4 for providing a previously installed roadway-marking strip already in service, with visibility in the rain,

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characterized by locally applying agglomerate platelets (Ap) to the installed roadway-marking strip (Ss) - said agglomerate platelets being designed to provide the marking strip (Ss) with visibility under rainy condition -, and further characterized by applying a melting-type adhesive to the underside of the platelets (Ap) and liquefying said adhesive prior to application of said platelets to the roadway-marking strip.

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9. A method in accordance with claim 8, characterized by successively or sequentially depositing said agglomerate platelets (Ap) with the melting-type adhesive on the underside onto the marking strip at intervals which measure at least four times the length of the agglomerate platelet, as measured substantially in the direction of the marking-strip.

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10. Equipment for depositing optical elements in the form of agglomerate pearl platelets, in accordance with the method as claimed in any of the preceding claims, characterized in that the equipment includes means for depositing said agglomerate platelets in a sequential or successive manner.

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11. Equipment in accordance with claim 10, characterized by utilizing, as a starting material, a ribbon obtained by longitudinally cutting a calendered item, and further characterized by transverse cutting means to obtain said agglomerate platelets (Ap) from said ribbon (1) by a transverse cut.

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12. Equipment in accordance with claim 10 or claim 11,

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characterized by suck and ejection means effective to first suck the agglomerate platelets and then blow them into position.

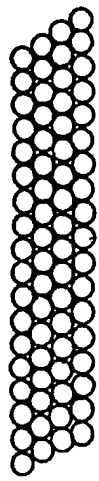
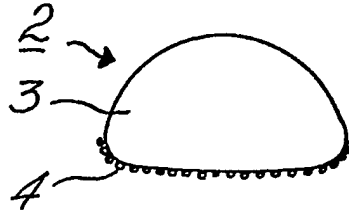
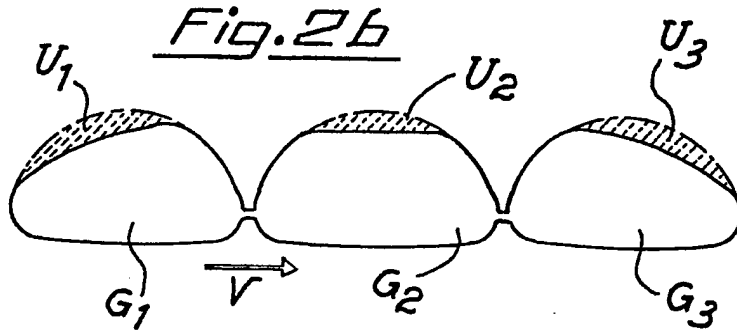
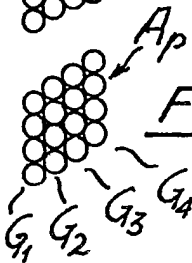
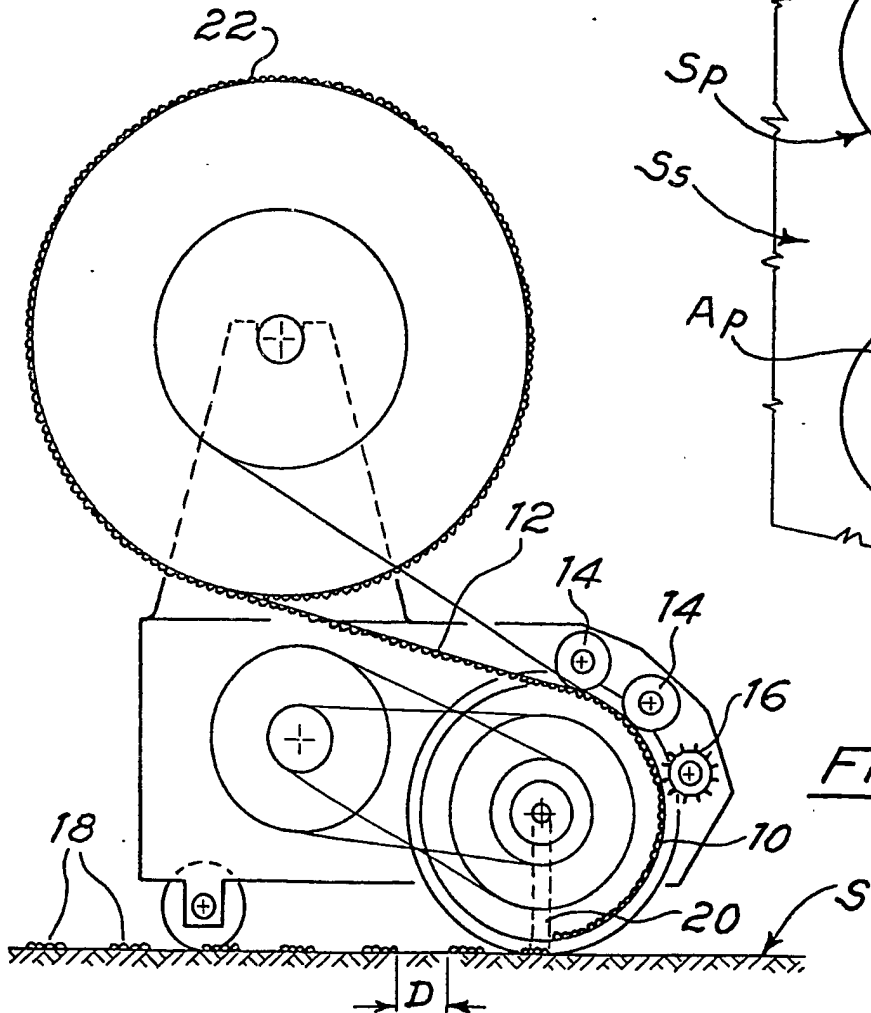
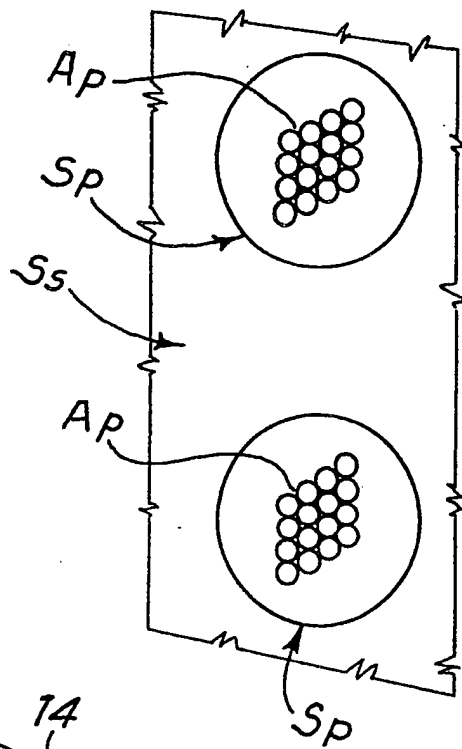
- 5 13. Equipment in accordance with claim 10, characterized
by cartridge storing means (40, 42, Fig. 5; 66, Fig. 6)
for storing said agglomerate platelets derived from
cutting a longitudinal ribbon, and deposition means
for said platelets from said cartridge storing means
10 onto the roadway marking.
14. Equipment in accordance with any of claims 10 through 13
characterized by the fact that the agglomerate plate-
lets held in the cartridge (66, 68, Fig. 6) are trans-
15 ferred and positioned onto a rotating drum (70) and
then onto the roadway-marking strip.
15. Equipment in accordance with claim 10, characterized
by including - together with at least one support
20 for at least one spindle of marking-strip ribbon
stock (12, Fig. 4; 80, 84, Fig. 7) - a means (10, 14,
Fig. 4; 86, 92, 94, Fig. 7) of guiding the said ribbon
stock (12; 84) towards the ground, upon which the
ribbon slides after bending-shearing operations (16;
25 98) have been done to the ribbon to provide the selectively
predisposed cut lengths.
16. Equipment in accordance with claim 15, characterized
by the fact that it includes a mechanical, hydraulic
30 or pneumatic device for progressively advancing the
material wound on the said spindle.

17. Equipment in accordance with claim 15 or claim 16,
characterized by including at least one roller,
preferably rubber-coated and provided with side
guides, for obtaining the above-said advancement.

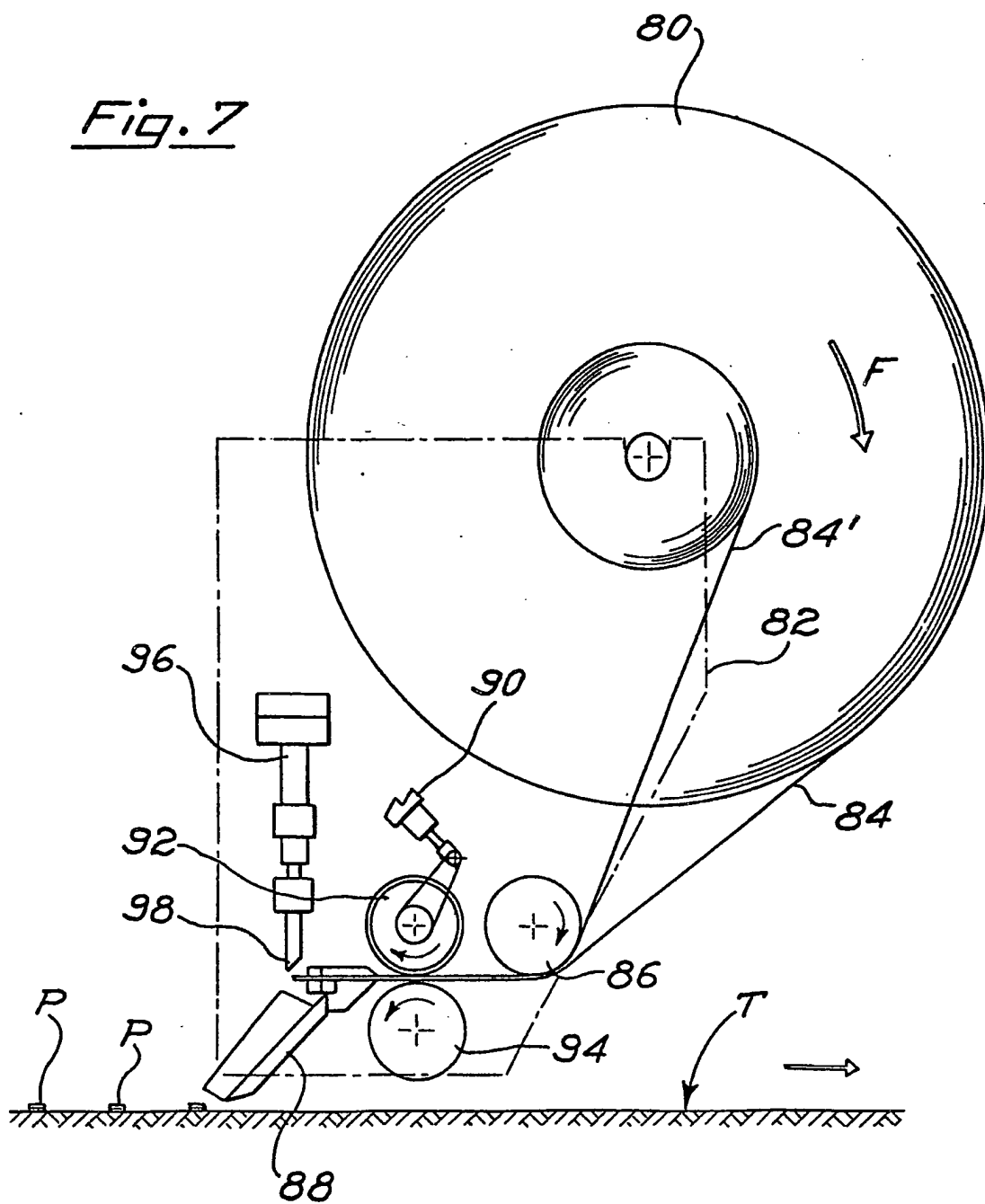
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18. Equipment in accordance with any of claims 15 to 17,
characterized by including bending-shearing punches
(98) for selectively cutting the roadway-marking
material while it is being guided downward onto the
roadway surface.

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Fig. 1'Fig. 2aFig. 2bFig. 1''Fig. 3Fig. 4

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Fig. 7



European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

0102585

Application number

EP 83 10 8302

| DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Category | Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages | Relevant to claim | CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl. 3) |
| A | DE-A-2 903 302 (EIGENMANN) * Whole document * | 1-3 | E 01 F 9/04 E 01 F 9/08 E 01 C 23/16 |
| A | DE-A-2 927 267 (EIGENMANN) * Page 12, last paragraph - page 14, paragraph 1; figure 1 * | 10, 12, 14 | |
| A | DE-A-3 018 693 (H. DEBUSCHEWITZ GMBH & CO. KG) * Figures 1-4 * | 10, 13 | |
| D, A | US-A-3 587 415 (EIGENMANN) | | |
| A | DE-A-2 632 107 (EIGENMANN) | | |
| | | | TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl. 3) |
| | | | E 01 F 9/00 E 01 C 23/00 |
| The present search report has been drawn up for all claims | | | |
| Place of search BERLIN | | Date of completion of the search 07-11-1983 | Examiner PAETZEL H-J |
| <p>CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS</p> <p>X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document</p> <p>T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document</p> | | | |